

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 30, 2002

St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

For More Information:

Rafe Boulon: (340) 693-8950 x 224

PLAN ADOPTED FOR CONTROL OF RATS, CATS AND MONGOUSES

John H. King, Virgin Islands National Park Superintendent, announced today the adoption of a *Plan for the Sustained Reduction of Non-native Rats, Cats and Mongooses from Virgin Islands National Park*, a long-range plan for minimizing impacts from these three feral, non-native species within the park. That plan has been finalized and approved by the Southeast Regional Director of the National Park Service.

Completion of the plan culminates a 12-month public planning process and represents the first time in the park's forty-five year history that there has been a comprehensive approach to managing non-native animal impacts on natural and cultural resources in the park.

Rafe Boulon, Chief of Resources Management at Virgin Islands National Park, explains that: "Non-native species such as rats, cats and mongooses pose a significant threat to the park's natural resources, long-term management programs, and visitor health and safety. The purpose of the sustained reduction program is to reduce non-native rat, cat and mongoose populations to levels where they produce minimal or no damage to park resources or threats to visitor and employee safety. The program, is therefore, termed a 'sustained reduction' because once the non-native populations are reduced to acceptable levels, the smaller populations will be maintained at that level or below. The proposed control program mirrors similar programs throughout the world and is needed to meet a variety of federal laws and National Park Service mandates."

Impacts associated with the presence and/or removal of other feral, non-native animal species such as domestic goats and wild hogs will be addressed in separate, future planning efforts.

The proposed sustained reduction program will be accomplished in three phases. In the first phase, various techniques will be employed to reduce harborage and food resources for the present populations. In phase two, techniques will be used to reduce populations to acceptable levels at sites throughout the park. Phase three will be to monitor and remove individuals that exceed threshold levels.

To reduce rat and mongoose populations, live traps or bait stations will be used at such sites as Hawksnest, Trunk, Cinnamon and Francis bays, with follow-up trapping/census to reduce populations to a level where they are no longer a significant problem. For feral cats, reduction efforts will employ live traps with efforts made to assist local animal care groups (e.g., St. John Animal Care Center) in placing the feral cats for adoption. Traps will be checked at no greater than 6-hour intervals so that cats are subjected to the least possible stress. Animal collars and ear-tags will be made available to the public so that domestic animals that may be inadvertently trapped can be returned to their owner.

The decision to adopt the *Plan for the Sustained Reduction of Non-native Rats, Cats and Mongooses from Virgin Islands National Park* is documented in a Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Park Service policy and guidelines. The FONSI is based upon a Draft Plan and Environmental Assessment (Plan/EA) released in June 2001, a Final Plan/EA released in October 2001, and comments of agencies and the public on the Draft and Final Plans/EA's.

Copies of the adopted Plan may be viewed at public libraries, the Park's Visitor Center in Cruz Bay, and National Park Headquarters at Christiansted, St. Croix, or can be downloaded from the Internet at www.nps.gov/viis or www.friendsvinp.org. Printed or electronic copies of the Plan also be requested at Rafe_Boulon@nps.gov or by calling (340) 693-8950 extension 224.

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